

Linked Together

Multiple Kentucky agencies unite to strengthen law enforcement's weakest link

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For an eternity, Kentucky law enforcement's weakest link has been jurisdictional boundaries.

In an effort to permanently fix that weak link, 26 law enforcement executives banded together to forge a new link, an inter-jurisdictional agreement that encourages criminal investigations across arbitrary boundaries.

"We are fighting mobile targets," said Justice and Public Safety Cabinet Secretary J. Michael Brown. "Bad guys do not at all recognize the little lines on a map we call borders. They have no jurisdictional sense whatsoever. [Our officers] need to be able to cross those jurisdictional lines whenever necessary and [they] can't always wait for all the right pieces to fall into place."

In September, Brown applauded the efforts of 26 central Kentucky chiefs and sheriffs for the creation of the Bluegrass and Central Kentucky Unified Police Protection System, or BACKUPPS. Based

on KRS 65.240, BACKUPPS allows officers from participating agencies to share jurisdictions. The system virtually erases the imaginary lines between counties and cities across the commonwealth, in order for officers and investigators to effectively and efficiently fight the crime that weaves in and out of Kentucky communities every day.

"That law has been on the books a long time and hasn't been completely capitalized on," said Department of Criminal Justice Training Commissioner John W. Bizzack. "There have been some agreements, but nothing like a room full of police executives saying this is how it's going to be organized and improved. I congratulate them on that, and DOCJT stands ready to assist."

FROM THE BEGINNING

About four years ago, the Central Kentucky Chiefs and Sheriffs Association

was formed to discuss regional issues and intelligence sharing.

"It was nice and we talked, but we didn't actually do anything — it was just another meeting," said Georgetown Police Chief Mike Bosse. "Eventually, it fizzled and died out."

At that time Bosse was with the Lexington Division of Police. Once he joined the Georgetown Police Department, Paris Police Chief Kevin Sutton approached him about restarting the association. But this time around Bosse and the other chiefs and sheriffs decided they wanted to positively impact their departments and communities — instead of just sitting in meetings, Bosse explained. When the conversation turned to the heroin epidemic plaguing their communities, the small group of approximately 10 agency heads began contemplating ways they could effectively work together to fight the problem.

"That sparked the idea of sharing jurisdictions," Bosse recalled. "We said, 'What if your [officers] could come into my jurisdiction and follow cases?' What if we said to the central Kentucky population that this group of officers was going to do something substantial and different?"

That's just what they did.

Bosse and the Georgetown Police Department took the helm of the initiative and began contacting other central Kentucky chiefs and sheriffs to explain the idea, setting up meetings to discuss logistics and parameters, and started forming an agreement all participating agencies could get behind. With the help of Andrew Hartly, former staff attorney for the Kentucky Department for Local Government and current city attorney for Georgetown, an agreement was drawn up and circulated to all area agencies, extending the invitation to join the initiative.

In a process that took nearly five months, the interested agencies met multiple times to solidify the agreement and put together standard operating procedures that every involved agency will be expected to follow.

"It's about reaching out," said Montgomery County Sheriff Fred Shortridge. "If you have a crime committed and it leads to someone [in another county] then we have an agreement that my detectives can go over there and work with their guys and not worry about liability because we have jurisdiction there. We can work together and that's what this is all about, reaching out to other agencies and using what they have in place, making us all more professional."

More than just coming together, Bosse hopes that this inter-jurisdictional initiative will elevate each involved agency to an even higher standard.

"I don't think we could have done this 20 to 30 years ago," he said. "You couldn't have >>

>> gotten [the agencies] at the table. But I've been impressed with the quality of people in the smaller agencies in central Kentucky. What we're doing here will make us better as a group. It's not too optimistic to say that coming together will lift us up."

"I've been in law enforcement since 1971 and I've never seen the law enforcement community come together and galvanize in anything that will benefit the law enforcement community or their respective communities, except forming the Peace Officer Professional Standards in 1996 and 1997," Bizzack said of the initiative. "The state police can't do it on their own; the sheriffs' offices can't do it on their own. These small municipal agencies need this type of assistance and agreement."

MAKING IT POSSIBLE

A major piece of the puzzle that makes a 26-agency, jurisdiction-sharing agreement

possible is the standardization of training each officer in the commonwealth receives in basic training.

"Every law enforcement agency gets the first 18, soon to be 22, weeks of the same basic training," Bizzack emphasized. "Today 82 percent of the nearly 8,000 law enforcement officers in Kentucky have been trained under POPS standards. I think this is a perfect illustration of how uniformed and standardized training on the basics gives a great opportunity for this level of interagency cooperation."

Before POPS, many agencies had their own, individual methods of law enforcement.

"The concerns that we all know existed at one point in time aren't going to be a problem for us now," Bizzack said.

One of the few stipulations this agreement requires of its involved agencies is each participant must be a POPS-certified

officer, Bosse explained. Sheriffs, however, are exempt from the certification requirement, by statute, and their current arrest powers in their jurisdiction would carry to the other jurisdictions.

"This is a tremendous validation of POPS and what POPS has done for this state," Secretary Brown said. "The training through DOCJT and the other three academies creates a situation where you can have confidence in officers from other jurisdictions."

"When we have a demonstration of this type of collaborative effort between our law enforcement offices rooted in the principles of POPS and the Kentucky Law Enforcement Foundation Program Fund, I get excited about it," Brown continued.

WHO HAS YOUR BACK?

In the beginning phases of the BACKUPPS initiative, liability concerns were

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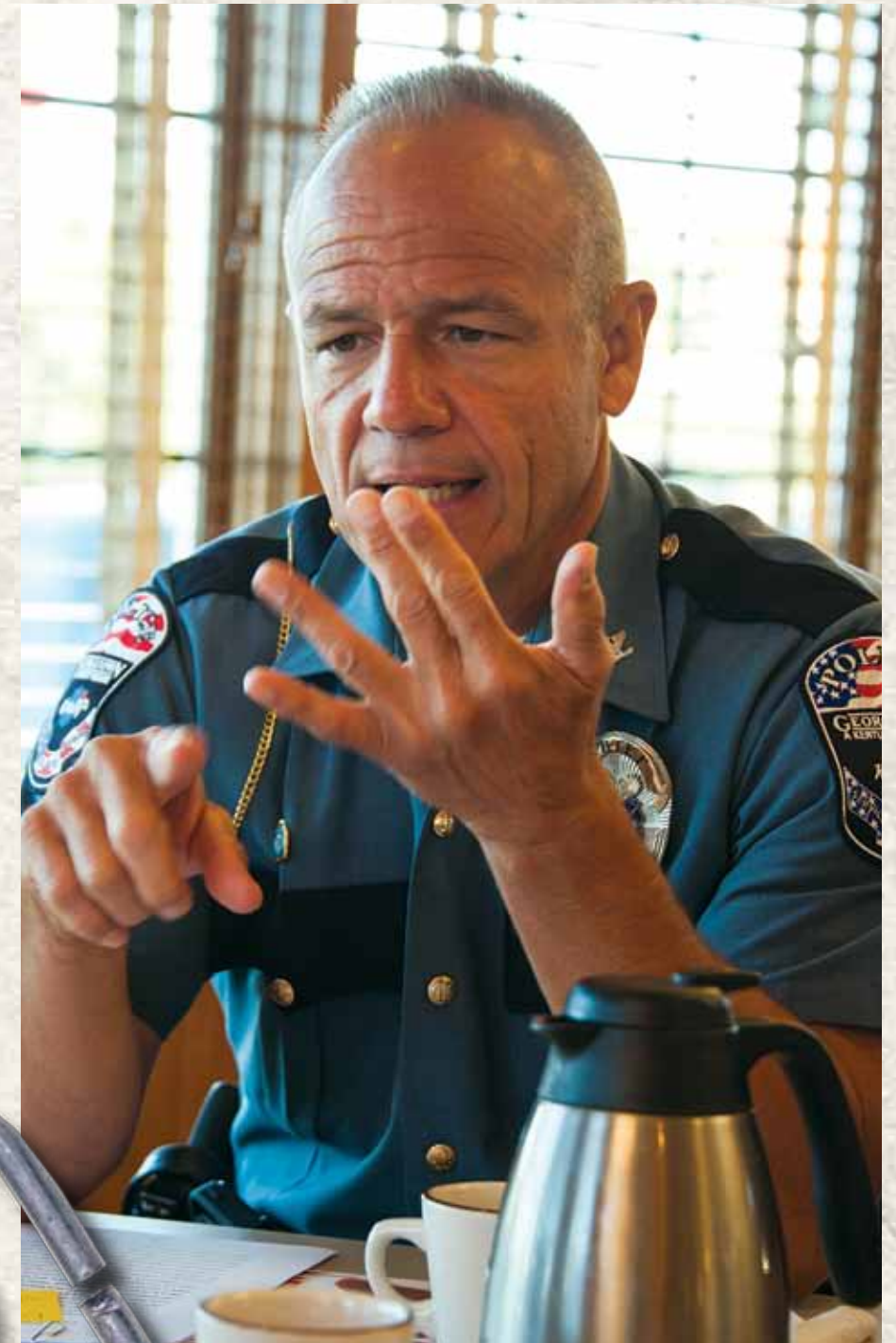
KRS 65.240

65.240 Joint exercise of power by state agencies with other public agencies.

(1) Any power or powers, privileges or authority exercised or capable of exercise by a public agency of this state may be exercised and enjoyed jointly with any other public agency of this state, and jointly with any public agency of any other state or of the United States to the extent that the laws of the United States permit such joint exercise or enjoyment. Any agency of the state government when acting jointly with any public agency may exercise and enjoy all of the powers, privileges and authority conferred by KRS 65.210 to 65.300 upon a public agency.

(2) Any two (2) or more public agencies may enter into agreements with one another for joint or cooperative action pursuant to the provisions of KRS 65.210 to 65.300. Appropriate action by ordinance, resolution or otherwise pursuant to law, of the governing bodies of the participating public agencies shall be necessary before any such agreement may enter into force.

(3) A state-supported institution of higher education and one (1) or more county or independent public school districts may enter into agreements under KRS 65.210 to 65.300 for the purposes specified in KRS 65.230, notwithstanding any other provision of the statutes restricting, qualifying or limiting their authority to do so. ■



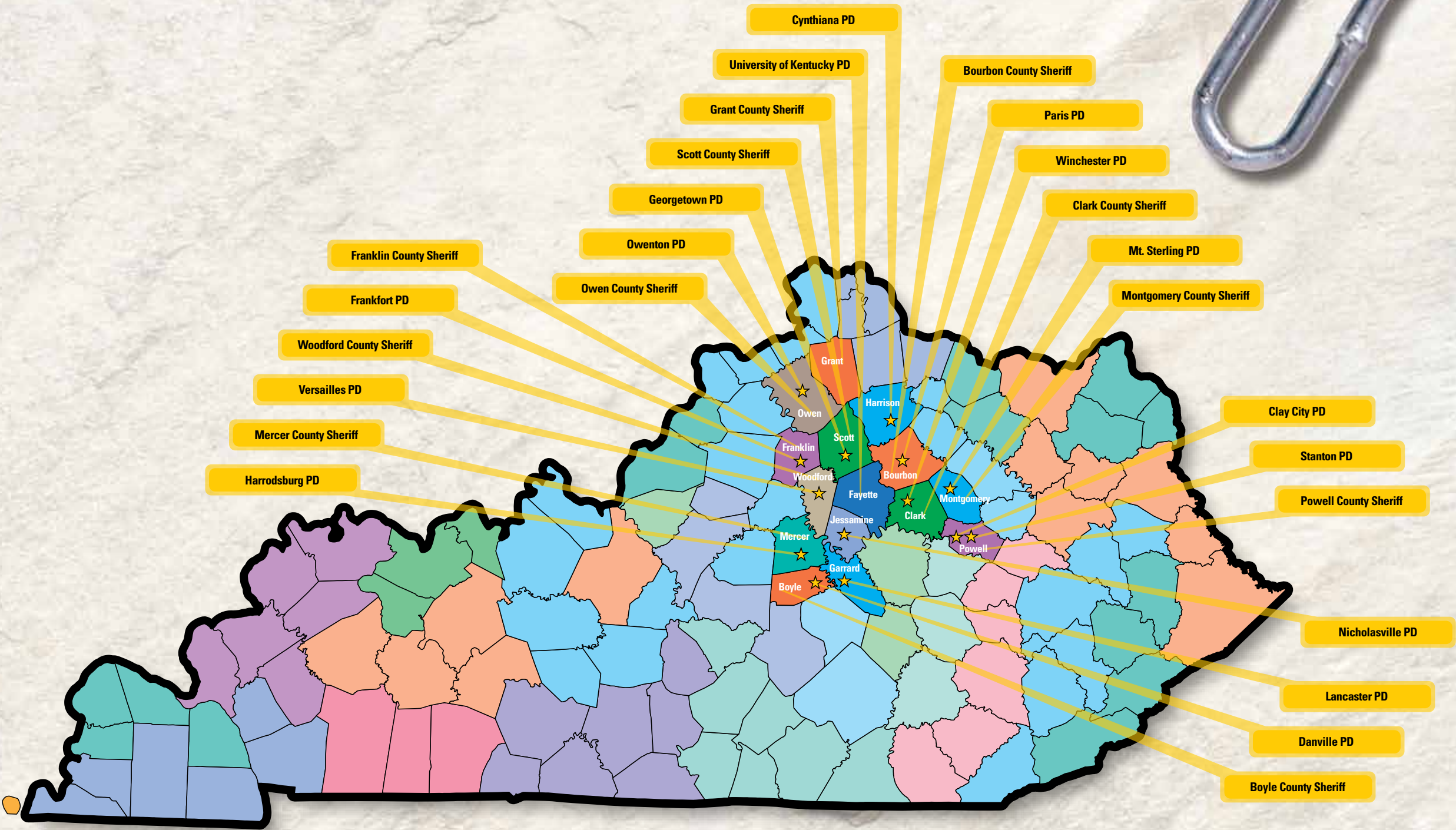
▲ Georgetown Police Chief Mike Bosse spearheaded the BACKUPPS initiative. With help from several chiefs and sheriffs in central Kentucky, as well as the Georgetown city attorney, Bosse and his staff collected, packaged and disseminated the necessary information to launch BACKUPPS.

PHOTO BY JIM ROBERTSON

Bluegrass and Central Kentucky Unified Police Protection System (BACKUPPS)

Agencies that have passed the resolution and are named in the agreement:

- Bourbon County Sheriff Office
- Boyle County Sheriff Office
- Clark County Sheriff Office
- Clay City Police Department
- Cynthiana Police Department
- Danville Police Department
- Frankfort Police Department
- Franklin County Sheriff Office
- Georgetown Police Department
- Grant County Sheriff Office
- Harrodsburg Police Department
- Lancaster Police Department
- Mercer County Sheriff Office
- Montgomery County Sheriff Office
- Mount Sterling Police Department
- Nicholasville Police Department
- Owen County Sheriff Office
- Owenton Police Department
- Paris Police Department
- Powell County Sheriff Office
- Scott County Sheriff Office
- Stanton Police Department
- University of Kentucky Police Department
- Versailles Police Department
- Winchester Police Department
- Woodford County Sheriff Office





▲ Justice and Public Safety Cabinet Secretary J. Michael Brown addressed the group of chiefs, sheriffs and agency representatives from the 26 participating BACKUPPS agencies on Sept. 25. Brown lauded their efforts in putting a new spin on an old law to best serve Kentucky's citizens.

PHOTO BY JIM ROBERTSON

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paramount among agency executives, Bosse said.

"Liability was a big issue," he said. "With BACKUPPS, when an officer goes into another county, he will carry his indemnity with him. As long as he is doing his job, then he's covered."

For officers, the sense of security BACKUPPS offers when they are outside their jurisdiction is huge, Bosse said. He recalled a situation where a Georgetown officer was inside a Paris store and saw a security guard wrestling with a shoplifter. Quickly the shoplifting turned into robbery. The Georgetown officer witnessing the scene hesitated because he didn't know if he was covered out of jurisdiction. Finally, the officer acted as a citizen and wrote down the license plate number and reported it to the Paris police.

"I had never thought of it before that," Bosse said. "We expect them to do something, but we never tell them we have their back if they do. We want [officers] to feel comfortable taking action, and if we want them to do that, they deserve some sense of security that we have them."

"Even though they were trained at the same academy with the same hours, since it was not their jurisdiction, they had to act as citizens," Bosse continued. "Now there is such a sense of security knowing they can act on what they already are trained to do."

In the process of putting BACKUPPS together, Bosse contacted J.D. Chaney at the Kentucky League of Cities as well as members of the Kentucky Association of Counties. Both organizations were pleased with the idea, supported the initiative and said they would love to see it take effect in all parts of the state, Bosse said.

COLLABORATION AT ITS BEST

"There hardly is a single crime that stays local," Bosse said. "Theft, drugs — those are regional issues. My metal thieves don't stay in Scott County. They may steal in

Scott County, but sell in another county. Drugs are the same way — they will sell it wherever someone will buy it."

Many area law enforcement executives agree.

"When you're running investigations, nearly all of them run out of your jurisdiction," Nicholasville Police Chief Barry Waldrop said. "Now you'll be sworn in adjacent places and jurisdictions and be able to operate."

"It's a no brainer," Danville Chief Tony Gray added. "Crime is not just isolated to your community — especially drugs. We had done some of these things without the formality before. It's great to get the formalities out of the way so we are ready when it happens again. Now we have a plan and know what to do, we just have to execute the plan."

Beyond drug and theft investigations, having a widespread jurisdiction can be helpful in cases of transporting mental health patients, Franklin County Sheriff Pat Melton added. Melton was part of the initial group who proposed the BACKUPPS

initiative and has supported it along the way.

"Occasionally, when transporting 202As (mental health patients) they can get rowdy or out of hand," Melton said. "BACKUPPS is a great way to have coverage all the way to Eastern State Hospital. It reduces the liability on tax payers of Franklin County and other counties."

Moreover, BACKUPPS creates more security for citizens in the allied jurisdictions.

"It's for them; it's all about our citizens," Shortridge said. "We're broadening our investigations to better serve our citizens. If you're a victim, we will work hard to solve your crime. We have 26 agencies with different ideas that can come together, and someone will come up with something."

"This can only be a plus for law enforcement and our communities," he continued. "Instead of being stagnant and doing nothing, we are putting our heads together to do something about [all our issues.] 🐾"

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